

Religious Literacy in the New Latino Diaspora: Combating the “Othering” of Muslim Refugee Students in Nebraska

Jessica Sierk

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Many communities across the United States have been undergoing recent demographic changes. Since the 1980s, low-skilled labor (e.g. meatpacking) has attracted Latino families to settle in communities that historically have been home to few, if any, Latinos (i.e. the New Latino Diaspora). In more recent years, these same job opportunities have also characterized these communities as prime locations for refugees from countries like Somalia and Sudan. As a result, schools in these settings are serving an even more diverse student population than they were twenty, ten, or even five years ago. Given that the contexts of the New Latino Diaspora (NLD) and refugee resettlement may differ substantially, schools that have made steps to traverse one demographic change (i.e., working with Latino students) cannot necessarily use the same methods to tackle the other (i.e., working with Muslim refugee populations). Beyond formal school planning, Muslim refugee youth in NLD communities are often targets of post-9/11 Islamophobia, while peers and teachers alike often lack the religious literacies needed to ensure these youths' school success. This paper draws on the case of one particular Nebraska community to shed light on how seemingly unrelated instantiations of demographic change (i.e., the NLD and refugee resettlement) produce a unique context to consider the need to develop religious literacy as a component of multicultural education in both teacher preparation and K-12 schooling environments. After considering emerging ethnographic data from a larger study, I provide action-oriented recommendations based on the scholarship concerning religious inclusivity. Keywords: multicultural education, New Latino Diaspora, refugee resettlement, religious literacy

Demographic change and newfound diversity are becoming increasingly common realities in many towns and small cities across the United States. Two such demographic changes are the New Latino Diaspora (NLD) and the even newer pattern of Muslim refugee resettlement. Murillo and Villenas (1997, cited in Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2002) defined the NLD as the temporary and permanent settlement of increasing numbers of Latinos in areas that had not traditionally been home to Latinos. More recently, refugee populations (resulting from both refugee resettlement and secondary migration) are being drawn to NLD locations to take on the same types of low-skill, low-wage work (e.g., meatpacking) that originally attracted Latino immigrants. Due to recent controversy over immigration policy and instances of U.S.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids at meatpacking plants (see, Hamann & Reeves, 2012; Reynolds & Didier, 2013), refugees are sometimes sought as a “legal” alternative¹ to Latino workers, thereby initiating a second demographic transition in NLD communities.

As a result of these overlapping instantiations of demographic change, schools in these locales are serving a much more diverse student population than they were 20, 10, and even five years ago. Partially because of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) decision, which required making instructional accommodations for English language learners (ELLs), schools in these communities have generally focused their attention on meeting the linguistic needs of their newly diverse student populations. However, due to “Christian hegemony” (Blumenfeld, 2006) and the concurrent intent of keeping church and state separate, religious differences become more complicated attributes of newcomer populations (e.g., Muslim refugees) for schools to address.

Given that the religious contexts of the NLD and refugee resettlement may differ substantially, schools working to traverse one demographic change (i.e., working with Latino students) cannot necessarily use the same methods to tackle the other (i.e., working with refugee populations). In post-9/11 America, Muslim populations have experienced increasing animosity due to a growing trend of Islamophobia, “a racism that is justified by cultural and religious difference” (Housee, 2012, p. 106). Therefore, in communities with growing refugee populations from majority-Muslim nations, one may anticipate a degree of religious dissonance that was generally not present during the growth of the Latino population. This dissonance sets up a need for religious literacy – “the ability to discern and analyze the intersections of religion with social, political, and cultural life” (AAR, 2010, p. 4) – as a way for multicultural education to be integrated into K-12 school settings.

Stockbridge, Nebraska (pseudonym) is an NLD community with a meatpacking plant and a newly majority Latino public school enrollment. Stockbridge also has a growing population of Muslim refugee students. Drawing on interview data from a larger critical ethnography examining students’ experiences “coming of age” in two NLD communities, this paper first considers the particulars of how Nebraska and the community of Stockbridge can shed light on

¹ The NLD has always included a mix of those with legal work status and some who are “undocumented.” Employers fearing penalties for possibly hiring Latino workers with false documents may seek to hire those they know are legally recognized as refugees (which internationally-originating Latino populations almost always are not) to avoid this risk.

how seemingly unrelated instantiations of demographic change (i.e., the NLD and refugee resettlement) produce a unique context in which to study the importance of developing religious literacies through multicultural education. Then, action-oriented recommendations of how Nebraska and Stockbridge, as well as other states and communities experiencing demographic change, can be more inclusive of students who are Muslim or who practice other minoritized religions.

The Case of Stockbridge, Nebraska

Nebraska is home to several substantial non-metropolitan NLD communities, as well as significant Latino populations in Omaha and Lincoln. Although refugee resettlement primarily takes place in Lincoln and Omaha, secondary migration, including that precipitated by packing plants seeking new workers, has impacted other communities in the state, most of which have high Latino populations. One such community is Stockbridge. The school district in Stockbridge has an enrollment that is about two-thirds Hispanic, with a modest and growing Black population that includes more African refugees from Somalia and Sudan than African Americans. This has not always been the case. Ms. Artz (pseudonym), a white, female family and consumer science teacher at Stockbridge, described the demographic changes she has observed in her 13 years teaching in the district:

I would say when I first came here, we had more Hispanic students who were newcomers that had limited English, and because of the area I teach, we're one of the first stops out of newcomers [...] I knew enough Spanish to do numbers and basic food words and I took several ESL classes to be able to get some ideas of how to teach my students better [...] Now I think it's changed that it seems to be... the kids are more, not that there's no newcomers, but a lot more of our students must be second or third generation, and so when I first came here whether to let students speak Spanish in class was like, I wouldn't say a hot button issue, but it was a discussion and the administration basically said, you know, do what's comfortable for you, but now that never even comes up [...] I don't know if it was about four or five years ago, the number of African students has increased. I think most of them were refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and it's harder to know their background because they usually come through either Minneapolis... they're coming from another U.S. city, but obviously there's more challenges there because, you

know, there's fewer of them and obviously I have no... I don't even know any words in any of the languages they speak and so if they're really limited in English, it's a lot harder and I'm less aware of their culture to even be able to give cultural examples.

Ms. Artz's rough sketch of Stockbridge's demographic transition acknowledged that these two instantiations of demographic change present both similar and different challenges. She mentioned that the decision of whether or not to allow students to speak Spanish in the classroom, a linguistic challenge, was one of the main issues the school faced with the increasing number of Latino students 13 years ago and one that gave her at least some opportunities to participate as she knew a little Spanish. In contrast, she mentioned that she does not know any of the languages that the refugee students speak, which positions her differently regarding how to welcome or use those languages in her classroom.

However, Mrs. Avery (pseudonym), a white, female guidance counselor at Stockbridge, mentioned that the accommodation of Somali students praying at one o'clock was one of the main challenges the school has faced with the increasing number of Muslim refugee students in the past few years. She explained,

It was wild there at first, when we weren't used to it because the girls would be in the bathroom and laying on the floor [...] And the other girls would be freaking out, and then this year a couple of them were out in the senior locker area doing that, and if you want to pray, you want to pray privately.

Thus, during Stockbridge's most recent demographic transition, differences in religion and religious practices have played more key role in impacting how the school is or isn't welcoming.

Religion of Immigrant and Refugee Populations

As illustrated in Ms. Artz's statement above, schools in previously majority-white communities that have experienced an increase in Latino students have traditionally focused on linguistic differences, while attention to differences in students' religious practices has been virtually nonexistent. This is due, in part, to the relative congruence between the religious beliefs of Hispanic newcomers and the extant white population in the United States. Pew Research Center (2014a) states, "Most Hispanics in the United States continue to belong to the Roman Catholic Church." Therefore, in terms of Latino immigration, there has not been much religious dissonance with the 78.5% of the United States population that identifies with some

sect of Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2013). Familiar religious institutions have generally already been in existence in NLD communities, although changes (e.g., the addition of bilingual services) have nonetheless been made. These changes have been met with varying reactions, some welcome, others contentious, from longer-established, white, largely monolingual populations.

In contrast, when considering new refugee populations settling in areas of the NLD, religion becomes a much more complex demographic factor, a sentiment echoed by Mrs. Avery's statement above. Kruizenga (2010) states, "Somalis [and other refugee populations] bring with them a combination of a minority culture, religion, and race that provides a different type of immigration issue" (p. 3). As mentioned by Ms. Artz, Stockbridge's refugees are mostly from Somalia and Sudan. Therefore, to fully understand the case of Stockbridge, it is important to discuss the religious contexts present in these countries, and the belief systems (often little previously known in Nebraska) that these refugees bring with them.

According to Pew Research Center (2012), the majority of people in Sudan and Somalia are Muslim. However, the religious backgrounds of the refugees from these countries are more complex than is illustrated by looking at their countries' religious majority. The Darfuri, one refugee population from Sudan, are predominantly Muslim. However, according to the Cultural Orientation Resource Center (2011), "[T]raditional animist beliefs are frequently incorporated into their Islamic religious practice. Most Darfuri Moslems do not follow *sharia*, a set of laws based on the religious codes of the Koran and implemented as an Islamic legal system" (p. 3). Therefore, the version of Islam practiced by the Darfuri is likely different in important ways than the versions practiced by other Muslim populations.

While Sunni Islam is the majority religion in Somalia, some Somali Bantu deviate from this trend. The Bantu traditionally practiced their own indigenous spiritual beliefs and ceremonies. However, according to Van Lehman and Eno (2003), "Since Muslims are prohibited from owning Muslim slaves, some Bantu freed themselves from slavery by converting to Islam. Over time, many others also converted to Islam. A small number of Bantu who resided in the Dadaab refugee camps recently converted to Christianity" (p. 13). Thus, the Somali Bantu peoples seeking refuge in communities like Stockbridge very well may represent a plethora of religious backgrounds, including but not limited to the practice of Islam. Some Christian refugees from Somalia may not experience as much religious dissonance during their

resettlement in the United States, as their practices better match the religious practices of the dominant Christian/Catholic groups, with regard to both the long-established Anglo populations and the more recent Latino populations. However, differences between how Christianity is perceived and practiced by new refugee groups (e.g., the Somali Bantu) and native-U.S. Christian populations may also create tension.

The perceptions that teachers, students and other community members hold about refugee populations and their religious practices are also key to understanding the complexity of this scenario. When refugees from Somalia, and even Sudan, do not match their home country's majority religion, people may assume that they practice a traditional form of Islam due to where they come from, the languages they speak, and their phenotypical appearances². These perceptions, propagated by the U.S. media, may impact how individuals and communities interact with new refugee groups. According to the Pew Research Center (2014b), on a scale of 0-100, 100 being as warm and positive as possible, "The public views atheists and Muslims more coldly; atheists receive an average rating of 41, and Muslims an average rating of 40." This contrasts with data that suggests that "Jews [average rating of 63], Catholics [average rating of 62], and evangelical Christians [average rating of 61] are viewed warmly by the American public." These high ratings make particular sense for Catholics and evangelical Christians who make up 23.9% and 26.3% (respectively) of the United States population (Pew Research Center, 2013), as "[r]eligious groups are rated more positively by their own members than by people from other religious backgrounds" (Pew Research Center, 2014b). The high rating for Catholics may also function to ease the transition of Latino newcomers. However, the low rating for Muslims means that religious dissonance likely exists between refugee newcomers and the existing, predominantly Christian population in NLD communities.

Religious Intolerance in the United States

The United States has a long history of religious intolerance. Native Americans, Irish Catholics, and Jews were among the earliest religious minority groups to be targeted by religious discrimination. This history of religious intolerance continues today, triggered by recent events (e.g., 9/11) and largely directed towards Muslims. The reactivity of this particular instantiation

² Based on judgments of phenotype, these newcomers may also be assumed to be African American, an identity that they likely would have little familiarity with prior to arriving in the U.S.

of religious intolerance is compounded by the increasing number of Muslim individuals residing in the United States. According to Pew Research Center (2011), “The Muslim share of the U.S. population (adults and children) is projected to grow from 0.8% in 2010 to 1.7% in 2030.” This population growth may exacerbate an already hostile environment, as unfamiliar groups in small number are much less likely to be a source of concern than when their numbers are larger.

Christian Hegemony and Privilege

While the United States does not have a national religion (due to the Establishment Clause), Elia (2006) points to our nation’s motto as indicative of Christianity’s centrality to our national culture.

It is no mere coincidence that the nation’s first motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, was replaced in 1956 with the more representative ‘In God We Trust.’ After all, the embrace of plurality had to stop somewhere, and the lines have historically been drawn most clearly with regards to religion. (p. 155).

Blumenfeld (2006) defines Christian hegemony as “the institutionalization of a Christian norm or standard, which establishes and perpetuates the notion that all people are or should be Christian thereby privileging Christians and Christianity, and excluding the needs, concerns, ethno/religious cultural practices, and life experiences of people who are not Christian” (p. 196). The long history of American involvement in missionary work exemplifies this understanding.

The privilege given to Christian members of American society necessarily entails that members of other religions do not have access to the same religious privilege. Schlosser (2003) states, “Christian privilege is likely to be a result of Christianity being the nonconscious ideology (in terms of religious group membership) of the United States” (p. 47). He offers a list of 28 Christian privileges that are often taken for granted by our nation’s religious majority. Christian hegemony and Christian privilege are important concepts to consider in the discussion of how refugee students, specifically those from majority-Muslim countries, experience schooling in the United States and specifically in communities where other newcomer groups’ religious practices have mostly correlated with those of the dominant group.

Perhaps the clearest example of Christian hegemony in schools is the centrality of Christmas, an undeniably Christian holiday. Seifert (2007) suggests that “[t]he perceived secularization of Christmas has helped to reinforce its position as central to the college and

university calendar” (p. 12). The same can be said for K-12 calendars. Many aspects of the Christmas holiday have been commercialized to the point where they may be said to be cultural rather than religious (e.g., Christmas trees, Santa Claus, etc.). However, given that culture and religion are often intricately intertwined, even these cultural icons cannot be divorced from their religious connotation, especially when viewed from the lenses of non-Christian individuals. Thus, Christian overtones in the form of Christmas break (sometimes referred to as the more politically correct term “holiday break” or “winter break”), holiday music programs featuring Christmas carols, and classroom Christmas decorations demonstrate Christian hegemony and act to marginalize non-Christian students and families.

In a more general sense,

Students who are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, and of other faiths, and non-believers, for example, see few of their perspectives and few, if any, people who look like them, people who believe as they believe, or people who adhere to the cultural expressions that they adhere to introduced and discussed in their classroom lessons. (Blumenfeld, 2006, p. 198)

Blumenfeld offers many other more concrete examples of how non-Christian students are marginalized in U.S. schools: Jewish students having to request an excuse for their “High Holy Days” between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jehovah’s Witnesses having to request an excuse from the observance of holidays in schools, and Muslim students being forced to stay in the lunch room during Ramadan when they are fasting.

One reason why Christian hegemony has continued to be so prevalent in U.S. schools is the relative invisibility of Christian privilege amongst a predominantly Christian teaching force. In their study of traditional-aged White, Christian undergraduate teacher education students, Blumenfeld and Jaekel (2012) found that participants were aware of the broad prevalence of Christianity in the form of holidays recognized by companies, schools, and other entities largely overlapping with Christian holidays, as well as Christian holidays being celebrated in the media (e.g., Christmas music on mainstream radio stations and Christmas films shown on television). However, participants resisted the idea that this was “privilege.” Thus, the hegemonic nature of Christianity is perpetuated in our society and schools, and sometimes results in more insidious forms of non-Christian marginalization, such as Islamophobia.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia, simply defined, means a fear of Islam. However, this phenomenon has more complex ramifications for American Muslims and refugees from majority-Muslim sending countries (e.g., Somalia and Sudan). Taras (2013) states, “[Islamophobia] bundles religious, ethnic, and cultural prejudices together, just as anti-Semitism (which involves more than anti-Judaism) does” (p. 425). Thus, Islamophobia is *more* than a fear of Islam. As Taras suggests, Islamophobia has ethnic and cultural implications on top of the more obvious religious ones.

Kundnani (2007) adds to this logic.

[A]nti-Muslim sentiment rationalises itself as no more than criticism of an ‘alien’ belief system – hostility to religious beliefs rather than to a racial group – and therefore entirely distinct from racism. But such distinctions are undermined by the fact that religious belonging has come to act as a symbol of racial difference. (p. 30)

Islamophobia merges the Muslim and “Other” categories, making adherents of Islam appear as a monolithic outgroup when there is actually great diversity among Muslims and, as shown previously, refugees from majority-Muslim sending countries. In short, Islamophobia places practicing Muslims, people from countries with Islam as a dominant religion, and Arabic-speaking populations into one monolithic group, and conjures fear around a simplistic understanding of much more complex and diverse religious and ethnic phenomena.

Islamophobia’s ethnic, cultural, and racial implications may complicate the resettlement experience of refugees from majority-Muslim sending countries, especially those from African countries like Sudan and Somalia. Basford (2010) contrasts the experiences of Black Muslim immigrant youth with those of Asian and Latino immigrants, stating that all three groups are met with xenophobia, but Black Muslims are also met with increased racism and Islamophobia. Furthermore, Love (2009) states, “As a result of this racialized process, Islamophobia affects Christians, Muslims and Sikhs from all backgrounds and, in particular, people who have ancestry in North Africa as well as in western and southern Asia” (p. 402). As previously stated, perception is key. Therefore, individuals from regions in which Islam is prevalent, such as Somalia and Sudan, may be targets for Islamophobia even when they are not, in fact, Muslim.

According to Basford (2010), Islamophobia is only one type of discrimination that Muslim youth experience. Other discrimination involves “ongoing, less overt religious and cultural barriers presented in schools” (p. 494). Collet (2010) attributes this type of

discrimination to “a lack of understanding diverse faith backgrounds” and calls it “a *denial* of migrant minority religions and cultures,” citing examples including,

...denying minority religion migrant students the right to express their religious identities through wearing specific dress and/or their right to practice their faith through prayer, observation of dietary restrictions, or other related matters, even where such rights are protected by the Free Exercise Clause. (p. 193)

As stated in *Sherbert v. Verner* (1963):

[T]he Free Exercise Clause affirmatively requires government to create an atmosphere of hospitality and accommodation to individual belief or disbelief. In short, I think our Constitution commands the positive protection by government of religious freedom – not only for a minority, however small – not only for the majority, however large – but for each of us. (p. 416)

Thus, in denying students the right to practice their religion (e.g., wearing the *hijab*, observing the *Dhuhr* and *Asr* prayer times that occur during the school day, having access to *halal* food choices, etc.), schools are violating the rights afforded to students by the Free Exercise Clause.

Blumenfeld (2006) shares several stories of Muslim students’ rights being violated. These include “a 17-year-old high school junior in Ohio, who was barred by school administrators from praying in an empty room at lunch and before and after class hours” (p. 199), a mother who had to repeatedly request that her elementary school student be able “to attend the school library or to remain in her classroom for the duration of her lunch period during the Muslim month of Ramadan in which it was her practice to fast from sunrise to sunset” (p. 200), and a Muslim elementary student who was told to wear a “Western-style bathing suit” rather than a “traditional Muslim full-body swimming garment during instruction in the school pool” (p. 205). These violations of students’ right to practice their religion have the potential to make school a hostile environment for Muslim students.

In sum, Islamophobia changes the resettlement process for Muslim newcomers (i.e., Somali and Sudanese refugees) in comparison to those not marked as Muslim (i.e., predominantly Catholic Latinos). Consequentially, Muslim refugee students may experience integration difficulties that their Latino peers did not encounter. My data show this dynamic occurs in the small town/city environs of the NLD.

Integration Difficulties

Basford (2010) discusses some of the integration difficulties experienced by Muslim youth whose religion and culture do not align with the dominant praxis of U.S. schools.

Muslim youth – East African or not, first generation or second, in the United States or elsewhere in the West – have been found to be in a precarious position, where conforming to Muslim cultural values constitutes a deviation from dominant cultural norms in the West, yet conforming to dominant cultural norms challenges Eastern cultural values. (p. 487)

Religious discrimination and ignorance play a major role in contributing to this precarious position as Muslim students, and immigrant and refugee youth writ large, struggle to integrate their cultural and/or religious values (in this case, Islamic beliefs) with Western cultural norms promulgated by dominant societal discourses at work in mainstream schools. Basford contends that school adjustment, for this reason, is difficult for Muslim youth.

Kruizenga (2010) states, “Muslim students are often alienated for displaying outward signs of their religion, such as wearing hijab and fasting during Ramadan” (p. 10). Oikonomidoy (2009) echoes that phenotypical characteristics and styles of dress make Muslim students a highly visible minority in U.S. schools. Thus, in adhering to their cultural and religious beliefs, Muslim students may be targets of religious discrimination due to outwardly apparent differences.

Some of these integration difficulties go unaddressed when school officials perceive refugee populations as relatively impermanent. However, this premise – that prospectively mobile students do not merit full support – is faulty. According to U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS, 2013a), “A refugee or asylee may apply for permanent resident status in the United States 1 year after being admitted as a refugee or being granted asylum status.” Permanent residency allows an individual to apply for citizenship after 3-5 years (USCIS, 2013b). Schools should serve all students in their attendance zone regardless of the population’s longevity. However, seeing as though refugee populations have the possibility of being a long-term population, it is even more hazardous for schools to disregard the needs of refugee populations, which sets up the need for religious literacy to address the aforementioned experiences of religious discrimination and integration difficulties Muslim students experience in U.S. schools.

Religious Literacy

Nieto and Bode (2012) state that multicultural education “challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, gender, and sexual orientation, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect” (p. 42). This expansive definition sets multicultural education up as a way of promoting religious literacy. Culturally relevant teaching, defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) as “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 283), has been established as a necessary component for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. This also applies to religious literacy, as Basford (2010) states, “For East African youth whose culture is often seen as an extension of their religion, a multicultural education that ignores their religious identity is incomplete in nature” (p. 494). Thus, for education to be truly multicultural and culturally relevant for many refugee students, religion must be addressed. One way to accomplish this is through the inclusion of educational practices that build religious literacy.

As previously defined, according to the American Academy of Religion (AAR) (2010) religious literacy is “the ability to discern and analyze the intersections of religion with social, political, and cultural life” (p. 4). AAR provides three premises for why schools should teach about religion: (1) “there exists a widespread illiteracy about religion in the U.S.,” (2) “one of the most troubling and urgent consequences of religious illiteracy is that it often fuels prejudice and antagonism, thereby hindering efforts aimed at promoting respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence, and cooperative endeavors in local, national, and global arenas,” and (3) “it is possible to diminish religious illiteracy by teaching about religion from a non-devotional perspective in primary, middle, and secondary schools” (pp. 5-6). Related to refugee students, inclusion of a religious literacy component to schools’ multicultural education efforts might alleviate some of the pressure they feel to conform and assimilate to Western cultural norms and expectations.³ Educating students, teachers, and community members about other religions (e.g., Islam) in majority-Christian communities where refugees are either being resettled or are secondarily migrating may lessen the religious dissonance, as well as any resulting animosity, by

³ Promoting familiarity with and respect for other cultures does not need to entail assimilation (see, Gibson, 1988).

making them more aware of what these newcomers' religious beliefs actually are and what that means for the community's new demographic profile.

Ignorance of non-Christian religious practices is a form of Christian privilege and is ironically supported by the rhetoric of "separation of church and state" and the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Both are often cited as reasons why religion should be (and is) largely invisible and absent from public education, but just as Pollock (2005) notes about race – where we paradoxically can perpetuate racism sometimes by talking about race and at other times by *not* talking about it – so too with religion. Not talking about it leaves existing hierarchies, ignorance, and misinformation intact.

AAR (2010) gives schools guidelines for teaching about religion that do not violate U.S. constitutional law. These include that the school's approach to religion is *academic* (not devotional), that it strives for *awareness* (not acceptance), that it involves *study* (not practice), that it *exposes* students to a diversity of religious views (not imposing a particular view), that it *educates* students about all religions (not promoting or denigrating religion), and that it *informs* (not seeking to conform) (pp. 7-8). By taking this approach, schools become more inclusive, welcoming places for all students, including Muslim refugee students.

Blumenbach (2006) gives many suggestions for how to push back against Christian hegemony in an effort to make education environments more inclusive for non-Christian populations. These include assessing the "needs, concerns, and life experiences of members of different faith communities and of non-believers [in your school, community, and/or your state]," developing policies, offering training to school personnel, developing library collections, organizing educational forums, including accurate information on religious issues in the curriculum, sponsoring school programs that feature speakers of different religious backgrounds, and recruiting religiously diverse faculty and staff (p. 207). He also gives suggestions for teacher continuing self-education, including learning about world religions and religious oppression, learning about the needs and experiences of people from other religious backgrounds, becoming aware of one's own privilege (if Christian), attending events outside one's own culture and religion, monitoring politicians and the media, and supporting candidates that champion religious pluralism (p. 207-208). Schlosser and Sedlacek (2003) give suggestions, which are geared toward college campuses but still relevant for K-12 settings to consider, on how to address religious holidays. These suggestions include distributing an annual calendar of

religious holidays, incorporating religious curricula into established diversity programs, and ensuring that campus policies reflect religious diversity (p. 32).

To be sure, this is a tall order because it seems to differ from so much current practice across the United States, not just in Stockbridge. Still, if Stockbridge is the venue that precipitated my thinking about the *new* new population in the NLD (i.e., refugee populations from predominantly Muslim countries like Somalia and Sudan), then I need to be able to think through what my recommendations would look like in local and tangible dimensions (i.e., how Stockbridge should continue its attempts at meeting the needs of its new Muslim students while continuing to meet the needs of its longer-established student populations). This includes needing to account for the uphill challenge of Islamophobia being so prevalent in the public sphere that even naming the problem raises the prospect of losing part of the audience to whom I direct this.

De Facto Religious Literacy versus What Is Possible/Needed

In Stockbridge, religious literacy is currently growing in haphazard, little-mediated fits and starts. The school reacted to the prayer incident by eventually providing students with a safe, private place to pray during the school day in the school's weight room. Teachers like Ms. Artz responded to students' curiosities – for example, a Latino student asking to see a female, Muslim student's hair – by explaining that “culturally, that is not an appropriate question to ask.” However, Stockbridge teachers' *de facto* occasional instantiations of melding religious literacy into their approach to multicultural education usually fall short because they are not attached to an overt priority. As a result, although Ms. Artz contends that she has never heard or seen any derogatory remarks or actions directed at Stockbridge's Muslim refugee students, students still lack “the ability to discern and analyze the intersections of religion with social, political, and cultural life” (AAR, 2010, p. 4). This is illustrated by Ms. Artz's recollection of students making derogatory comments about religious backgrounds that are not present in Stockbridge (in this case Judaism):

I don't know if it's because they don't know any Jewish people so they don't really connect that those are, you know, people just like your other classmates. But I don't know if it's a religious thing because I have a suspicion it's probably students that have a strong Catholic background, so they don't necessarily probably even... they just know it's a

different religion. I've found it... it's not a big thing, but, you know, I think I've heard it four or five times in 13 years, but it's weird that you know the main ethnic thing I hear is about Jewish people of all things.

This sets up the need for Stockbridge, and other communities, to make religious literacy an explicit goal. Through the inclusion of authentic lessons about religions that are both represented and absent from Stockbridge, incorporation of authentic discussions about religious discrimination and the students' experiences with it, and adoption of continuous dialogue about multiculturalism as a school norm, Stockbridge can more widely acknowledge the different dimensions of its increasingly pluralistic population as an NLD community with a growing Muslim refugee population.

References

- American Academy of Religion. (2010). Guidelines for teaching about religion in K-12 public schools in the United States. Retrieved from <https://www.aarweb.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Publications/epublications/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf>
- Basford, L. (2010). From headphones to hijabs: Cultural and religious experiences of Somali youth in U.S. schools. *Proceedings of Intercultural Competence Conference 1*, 1-26.
- Blumenfeld, W.J. (2006). Christian privilege and the promotion of 'secular' and no-so 'secular' mainline Christianity in public schooling and in the larger society. *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39(3), 195-210.
- Blumenfeld, W.J. & Jaekel, K. (2012). Exploring levels of Christian privilege awareness among preservice teachers. *Journal of Social Issues* 68(1), 128-144.
- Collet, B.A. (2010). Sites of refuge: Refugees, religiosity, and public schools in the United States. *Educational Policy* 24(1), 189-215.
- The Cultural Orientation Resource Center. (2011). Refugees from Darfur: Their background and resettlement needs. *COR Center Refugee Backgrounder (6)*. Washington, DC: The Cultural Orientation Resources Center at the Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Elia, N. (2006). Islamophobia and the "privileging" of Arab American women. *NWSA Journal* 18(3), 155-161.
- Gibson, M. (1988). *Accommodation without Assimilation: Sikh Immigrants in an American High School*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hamann, E.T., Wortham, S., & Murillo Jr., E.G. (2002). Education and policy in the New Latino Diaspora. In S. Wortham, E.G. Murillo, Jr., & E.T. Hamann (Eds.), *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity* (pp. 1-16). Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Hamann, E.T. & Reeves, J. (2012). ICE raids, children, media, and making sense of Latino newcomers in flyover country. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 43(1), 24-40.
- Housee, S. (2012). What's the point? Anti-racism and students' voices against Islamophobia. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 15(1), 101-120.
- Kruizenga, T.M. (2010). Teaching Somali children: What perceived challenges do Somali students face in the public school system. *International Journal of Education* 1(1), 2-17.
- Kundnani, A. (2007). Integrationism: The politics of anti-Muslim racism. *Race & Class* 48(4), 24-44.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal* 32(3), 465-491.
- Love, E. (2009). Confronting Islamophobia in the United States: Framing civil rights activism among Middle Eastern Americans. *Patterns of Prejudice* 43(3-4), 401-425.
- Nieto, S. & Bode, P. (2012). *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Oikonomidou, E. (2009). The multilayered character of newcomers' academic identities: Somali female high-school students in a US school. *Globalisation, Societies, and Education* 7(1), 23-39.
- Pew Research Center. (2011). The future of the global Muslim population. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>

- Pew Research Center. (2012). The global religious landscape. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>
- Pew Research Center. (2013). Religious landscape survey. Retrieved from <http://religions.pewforum.org/>
- Pew Research Center. (2014a). The shifting religious identity of Latinos in the United States. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latinos-in-the-united-states/>
- Pew Research Center. (2014b). How Americans feel about religious groups. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>
- Pollock, M. (2005). *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Reynolds, J.F. & Didier, C. (2013). Contesting diversity and community within Postville, Iowa: "Hometown to the world." In L. Allegro & A.G. Wood (Eds.), *Latin American Migrations to the U.S. Heartland* (pp. 169-198). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Schlosser, L.Z. (2003). Christian privilege: Breaking a sacred taboo. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 31, 44-51.
- Schlosser, L.Z. & Sedlacek, W.E. (2003). Christian privilege and respect for religious diversity: Religious holidays on campus. *About Campus*, 31-32.
- Seifert, T. (2007). Understanding Christian privilege: Managing the tensions of spiritual plurality. *About Campus*, 10-17.
- Sherbert v. Verner*. (1963). 374 U.S. 398, 83 S. Ct. 1790, 10 L. Ed. 2d 965.
- Taras, R. (2013). "Islamophobia never stands still": Race, religion, and culture. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(3), 417-433.
- USCIS. (2013a). I am a refugee or asylee: How do I become a U.S. permanent resident? Retrieved from <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/D3en.pdf>
- USCIS. (2013b). I am a permanent resident: How do I apply for U.S. citizenship? Retrieved from <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/B3en.pdf>
- Van Lehman, D. & Eno, O. (2003). The Somali Bantu: Their history and culture. *Culture Profile* (16). Washington, DC: Cultural Orientation Resource Center at the Center for Applied Linguistics.